

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A chess game apparatus comprising a plurality of inflatable chess pieces, wherein each inflatable chess piece has at least one flexible wall defining at least one interior air-space cavity that is adapted for being filled with air, such that when each chess piece is inflated it assumes an expanded configuration whereas when each chess piece is deflated it assumes a collapsed configuration, the collapsed configuration being more compact than the expanded configuration, and wherein each chess piece has at least one inflation opening that facilitates flowing air into the chess piece during inflation and that can be closed in a substantially air-tight manner.
2. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece when deflated in the collapsed position can be folded and/or rolled into a bundle.
3. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has an oversized configuration and yet when deflated in the collapsed configuration is adapted for being folded and/or rolled into a bundle having a major dimension of less than about two feet.
4. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has an oversized configuration and yet when deflated in the collapsed configuration is adapted for being folded and/or rolled into a bundle having a major dimension of less than about 20 inches.
5. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein all of the chess pieces of the apparatus are inflatable, and wherein all of the chess pieces when deflated in the collapsed configuration are adapted for being fitted inside a single carrying case.

6. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein all of the chess pieces of the apparatus are inflatable, and wherein all of the chess pieces are deflated in the collapsed configuration and are positioned inside a single carrying case.
7. The chess game apparatus of claim 6 wherein the apparatus includes thirty two inflatable chess pieces.
8. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein the inflatable chess pieces each have an oversized configuration characterized by dimensions that are sized to prevent the body of a player, standing at one side of an oversized playing board on which all the inflatable chess pieces are operatively positioned in starting positions, from shielding all the inflatable chess pieces from the view of a spectator located five feet or more away from said player.
9. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a height of between about 1 foot and about 10 feet.
10. The chess game apparatus of claim 9 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a height of between about 1.5 feet and about 7 feet.
11. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece when substantially emptied of filler material and deflated in the collapsed configuration has a weight of less than about 2 pounds.
12. The chess game apparatus of claim 11 wherein each inflatable chess piece when substantially emptied of filler material and deflated in the collapsed configuration has a weight of less than about 14 ounces.
13. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein the flexible wall of each inflatable chess piece is a non-rigid sheet comprising plastic or fabric.

14. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein the flexible wall of each inflatable chess piece has a thickness of less than about 1/8th inch.
15. The chess game apparatus of claim 14 wherein the flexible wall of each inflatable chess piece has a thickness of less than about 1/16th inch.
16. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each chess piece when inflated is identifiable as a particular chess character.
17. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each chess piece when inflated takes the shape of a particular chess character.
18. The chess game apparatus of claim 17 wherein each chess piece when inflated defines a substantially planar bottom surface.
19. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a weight-receiving system that can be selectively put into either a weighted state or an un-weighted state.
20. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a bladder that is adapted for being filled with a filler material to weight the chess piece.
21. The chess game apparatus of claim 20 wherein the bladder defines a weight-receiving cavity that is physically separated from the interior air-space cavity.
22. The chess game apparatus of claim 21 wherein the weight-receiving cavity of the bladder is adapted for being repeatedly filled with, and emptied of, filler material.
23. The chess game apparatus of claim 22 wherein the bladder has a selectively openable and closeable bladder opening for filling and emptying the weight-receiving cavity of the bladder.

24. The chess game apparatus of claim 23 wherein each inflatable chess piece includes a plug or cap configured for closing the bladder opening so as to trap filler material inside the weight-receiving cavity of the bladder.
25. The chess game apparatus of claim 20 wherein the bladder of each inflatable chess piece is substantially impermeable to sand.
26. The chess game apparatus of claim 20 wherein the bladder of each inflatable chess piece is substantially impermeable to water.
27. The chess game apparatus of claim 20 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a bottom region at which the bladder is disposed, such that when the bladder of each inflated chess piece is filled with filler material there is created a weighted base that stabilizes the inflated chess piece against tipping over.
28. The chess game apparatus of claim 27 wherein the bottom portion has a desired cross-sectional area and the bladder of each inflatable chess piece occupies less than the whole cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece, such that the inflated chess piece can be provided with a weighted base without having to fill a bladder spanning the whole cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece.
29. The chess game apparatus of claim 28 wherein the bladder of each inflatable chess piece defines a weight-receiving cavity and has a stabilizing configuration wherein the weight-receiving cavity has a major dimension of at least about $\frac{1}{2}$ of a major dimension of the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece.
30. The chess game apparatus of claim 29 wherein the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of each chess piece has a generally circular shape and a diameter, and

wherein the weight-receiving cavity has a major dimension of at least about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the diameter of the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece.

31. The chess game apparatus of claim 29 wherein the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of each chess piece has a generally square shape and a width, and wherein the weight-receiving cavity has a major dimension of at least about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the width of the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece.

32. The chess game apparatus of claim 29 wherein the weight-receiving cavity has a major dimension of at least about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the major dimension of the cross-sectional area of the bottom region of the chess piece.

33. The chess game apparatus of claim 20 wherein the bladder has a stabilizing configuration that is substantially triangular, substantially star-shaped, or substantially cross-shaped.

34. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has a manual inflation opening that is equipped with pinch valve.

35. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has an automatic inflation opening that is adapted for being operatively coupled with a nozzle of an air pump.

36. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein each inflatable chess piece has both a manual inflation opening equipped with pinch valve and an automatic inflation opening adapted for being operatively coupled with a nozzle of an air pump.

37. The chess game apparatus of claim 36 wherein the manual inflation opening and the automatic inflation opening are both on a bottom surface of the chess piece.

38. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 wherein at least one of the inflatable chess pieces bears gaming indicia.

39. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein each of the inflatable chess pieces bears gaming indicia.

40. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein gaming indicia is provided on a base of at least one of the inflatable chess pieces.

41. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein gaming indicia is provided on a bottom surface of at least one of the inflatable chess pieces.

42. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein each inflatable chess piece has an oversized configuration such that the bottom surface of each inflatable chess piece provides an oversized display area on which said gaming indicia is provided.

43. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein the gaming indicia includes information indicating a character name for the particular chess piece on which the indicia is borne and/or indicating allowed moves for the particular chess piece on which the indicia is borne.

44. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein the gaming indicia includes a graphic representation of allowed moves for the particular chess piece on which the indicia is borne.

45. The chess game apparatus of claim 44 wherein the graphic representation comprises a chess board diagram.

46. The chess game apparatus of claim 38 wherein the gaming indicia includes written instructions describing allowed moves for the particular chess piece on which the indicia is borne.

47. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a flexible chess board.

48. The chess game apparatus of claim 47 wherein the flexible chess board has an oversized configuration characterized by dimensions that are sized to prevent the body of a player standing at one side of the operatively laid-out chess board from shielding all areas of the chess board from the view of a spectator located five feet or more away from said player.

49. The chess game apparatus of claim 47 wherein the flexible chess board has an oversized configuration wherein there is delineated a playing region having a major dimension of at least about three feet.

50. The chess game apparatus of claim 49 wherein the major dimension of the playing region is at least about eight feet.

51. The chess game apparatus of claim 47 wherein the flexible chess board has openings dispersed over a major portion of its area.

52. The chess game apparatus of claim 47 wherein a periphery of the flexible chess board comprises a more durable material than a central region of the chess board.

53. The chess game apparatus of claim 52 wherein the central region comprises a mesh material.

54. The chess game apparatus of claim 47 wherein the flexible chess board defines one or more openings configured for receiving stakes, each such opening having a reinforced edge.

55. The chess game apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an inflation hose having an air pump receiving opening and a series of nozzles each configured for delivering air

into one inflatable chess piece of the chess game apparatus, such that the inflation hose can be used in conjunction with an air pump to simultaneously inflate multiple chess pieces.

56. A chess game kit comprising:

- (a) a plurality of inflatable chess pieces each having at least one flexible wall defining at least one interior air-space cavity that is adapted for being filled with air, such that when each chess piece is inflated it assumes an expanded configuration whereas when each chess piece is deflated it assumes a collapsed configuration, the collapsed configuration being more compact than the expanded configuration, wherein each chess piece at least one inflatable chess piece having at least one inflation opening that facilitates flowing air into the chess piece during inflation and that can be closed in a substantially air-tight manner, and wherein each inflatable chess piece has an oversized configuration wherein each inflatable chess piece has a height of between about 1 foot and about 10 feet; and
- (b) a flexible chess board, wherein the flexible chess board has an oversized configuration wherein there is delineated a playing region having a major dimension of at least about 3 feet.

57. The chess game kit of claim 56 wherein the major dimension of the playing region is at least about eight feet.

58. The chess game kit of claim 56 wherein the flexible chess board has openings dispersed over a major portion of its area.

59. The chess game kit of claim 56 wherein the flexible chess board can be folded and/or rolled into a bundle.

60. The chess game kit of claim 56 further comprising a plurality of stakes adapted for anchoring the flexible chess board to the ground.

61. The chess game kit of claim 56 further comprising a carrying case adapted for carrying the flexible chess board when the board is folded and/or rolled in a bundle and for simultaneously carrying all of the inflatable chess pieces when each chess piece is deflated in the collapsed configuration.

62. The chess game kit of claim 61 wherein all of the inflatable chess pieces are deflated in the collapsed configuration and positioned inside the carrying case together with the bundled chess board.

63. The chess game kit of claim 56 further comprising at least one air pump adapted for inflating the inflatable chess pieces.

64. The chess game kit of claim 56 further comprising an inflation hose having an air pump receiving opening and a plurality of nozzles for simultaneously flowing air into two or more of the inflatable chess pieces.

65. The chess game kit of claim 56 further comprising a plurality of stakes adapted for anchoring the flexible chess board to the ground, a carrying case having a board pocket configured for receiving the flexible chess board when the board is folded and/or rolled in a bundle and one or more piece pockets configured for receiving all of the inflatable chess pieces when each chess piece is deflated in the collapsed configuration and at least one stake pocket configured for receiving said plurality of stakes.

66. The chess game kit of claim 65 further comprising an air pump adapted for inflating the inflatable chess pieces, wherein the carrying case also has a pump pocket configured for receiving said air pump.

67. A method of providing a chess game apparatus, the method comprising:
a) providing a chess game apparatus comprising a plurality of inflatable chess pieces, wherein each inflatable chess piece has at least one flexible

wall defining at least one interior air-space cavity that is adapted for being filled with air, such that when each chess piece is inflated it assumes an expanded configuration whereas when each chess piece is deflated it assumes a collapsed configuration, the collapsed configuration being more compact than the expanded configuration, and wherein each chess piece has at least one inflation opening that facilitates flowing air into the chess piece during inflation and that can be closed in a substantially air-tight manner; and

b) inflating at least one of the inflatable chess pieces.

68. The chess game apparatus of claim 67 wherein the method comprises inflating all of the inflatable chess pieces.